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ABSTRACT

The authors concern themselves primarily with 2 effects of a school desegregation plan during the semester of its inception in Gainesville, Florida. One deals with the amount of interaction between blacks and whites on the school grounds; the other concerns their attitudes toward each other. Interaction was measured, through observation during the 3rd, 8th and 13th weeks of the semester. Low frequencies of interaction were obtained throughout the semester. The conclusion of the authors is that the merger resulted in mutual exposure of the races, but not in integration in any real sense. Measures of racial attitudes suggest improvement in this area, as well as in the area of tolerance. A brief discussion of the findings concludes that the most salient task for school systems engaged in racial mergers is to plan programs that result in integration in more than an administrative sense. (TL)

Effects of Sudden, Mass School Desegregation on Interracial
Interaction and Attitudes in One Southern City^{1,2}

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In February, 1971, in response to a federal court order, the junior and senior high schools of Gainesville, Florida underwent a massive racial integration. Previously, these schools had an open enrollment policy which resulted in token integration at best. The vast majority of black children in grades seven through twelve attended a completely segregated school. The so-called "white" junior and senior highs contained a select sample of about 5% blacks. Residentially, Gainesville is almost completely segregated.

The February desegregation plan consisted mainly of closing the black school, and reassigning students and teachers to the white schools. The result was a distribution of black to white students of about 50-50 in one junior high and 30-70 in the other junior high and in the senior high.

There were some rumblings of apprehension and protest proceeding the integration on the part of both communities; however, in perspective of what might have been, the merger began rather quietly. The calm was interrupted in March and April with several incidents at each of the schools, including one large fracas at the senior high which precipitated the stationing of a cordon of police nearby for several days. By May, however, matters returned to relative quiescence and have proceeded without noteworthy incident since.

The study I am going to relate was concerned primarily with two effects of the merger, assessed during the semester of its inception. One deals with the amount of interaction between blacks and whites on the school grounds; the other

concerns their attitudes toward each other.

Interactions were measured in the three schools; and, in the senior high, separately for the 10th grade which comprised the afternoon session, and the 11th and 12th grades combined, which met in the morning.

In each school we located the two principle areas of egress; places where large flows of students moved from their last classes off the grounds. During a given observation period, two graduate assistants, carrying pocket counters, were stationed inobtrusively within view of the area. One counted the total number of students interacting; that is, talking or obviously walking with others. The other observer counted the number of students who were interacting in racially mixed groups, separating these into same and cross sex interactions. Each observation period began with the dismissal bell and lasted until the area was clear.

Observations were made in three time periods; during the third, eighth, and 13th weeks of the semester. In each time period there were four observations of each school and session, two in each area.

The measure of racial attitudes consisted of three opinion statements included in a questionnaire with nine additional items relating to topics other than integration. Each statement had six response alternatives, labelled: I agree very much; I agree pretty much; I agree a little; I disagree a little; I disagree pretty much; I disagree very much.

Attitude items were:

1. Desegregation laws go against one of the principles of democracy - that everyone has the right to associate with whom he chooses.

2. The Supreme Court's decision that schools will be desegregated was right and fair.

3. Blacks and whites will find it easier to get along together in the same school than most people think.

Each item was scored from one to six, ranging from low to high prejudice, and the measure for each respondent was the sum of his answers to the three.

Attitudes were measured in all but one of the junior highs, where administrative problems precluded the distribution of the questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed by teachers in English classes, to half the classes at each grade level during the third week of the semester and to the balance during the 13th week. The time samples were also evenly divided with regard to the proficiency levels of the classes within grades; that is, accelerated, regular, etc. Students were asked to put their names and sex on the questionnaire. Race was not asked for, but this information was obtained for most of the sample at the close of the semester, from the teachers or the school records.

The major purposes of this study were straightforward. Quite obviously, we wanted to obtain measures of changes with time in the amount of interaction between blacks and whites and in their racial attitudes. We were interested, also, in how these changes, if any, related to grade level, race and sex.

To the best of our knowledge, there have been no systematic studies of interracial interactions in desegregated secondary schools. There have been several studies on changes in racial attitudes and, as Carithers (1970) finds in his review, when changes occur they may be in either direction. Beyond simply adding to this score, one of our further purposes was to assess the relationship between interaction and attitude change among the various schools and session.

We expected a direct relationship between these variables, based on the generally held notion that proximity between groups increases attraction by facilitating positive interaction (c.f. Allport, 1954; Newcomb, 1961). We were particularly curious however, about what the effects on attitudes would be if the merger did not result in a meaningful degree of interracial interaction. Dissonance theorists might contend that attitudes will become more positive anyway, as a function of the need to justify integration on the part of the people affected. From another viewpoint, however, mutual exposure of the races without interaction may produce negative attitude change. Concepts of racial differences and separateness, which may have been dormant and covert as long as there was no association at all, could become salient and overt with the effect of increasing prejudices.

Let us look at the data, first for interactions.

The base of the graph in Fig. 1 shows the three time periods in which observations were made. The ordinate shows the percentages of interracial interactions of total interactions for the four observations made in each time period. The four curves represent the various schools and sessions. The Ns on which the percentages were based ranged from 221 to 308 in the junior highs and 352 to 423 in the two sessions of the high school.

Although the graph seems to show consistent effects everywhere but in the 11th and 12th grade session of the high school; that is, an increase from the beginning to the middle of the term followed by a more moderate decrease, none of these differences approached significance. There is then just the merest suggestion that the amount of interracial interaction changed at all in any of the schools.

In terms of the absolute values of these percentages, the overall paucity of interracial interaction is striking. If race were not at all a factor in who talks to whom, the points on the graph should hover around the 50% mark. The largest percentage in any time period for any school, however, is 10.3 and the mean of all the percentages is 4.8. In general, then, one of every twenty students we observed interacting was communicating with someone of the other race. In the 11th and 12th grade session, this figure was one of forty.

Of the total number of interracial interactions in the two junior highs, 90% were among members of the same sex. This figure for the senior high, including both sessions, was 65%, and this difference was significant at $p < .01$. It is feasible, however, that boys and girls interact more, in general, in senior than in junior high and we did not have baseline measures to determine differences in relative frequencies.

There were no differences approaching significance in the ratio of same vs. opposite sex interracial interactions across time for any school or session, but because of the generally low frequency of interracial contacts, the N s in these analyses were too small to warrant a conclusion.

Let us turn now to the attitude data, which were analyzed by a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 6$ unweighted means analysis of variance for the two time samples, sex, race and grade levels seven through twelve.

First, the data with the two time samples combined:

There were no main effects of sex or race, but there was an interaction of these, significant at $p < .001$. White females and black males with means of 10.92 and 10.94 respectively, were both more positive toward integration

than either black females or white males, for whom the means were, respectively, 11.53 and 11.66.

Singer (1966) reported some congruent findings on racial attitudes of fifth grade northern children. In her study, in both segregated and non-segregated schools, white females indicated more willingness than white males to associate with blacks and black females expressed less willingness than black males to associate with whites.

There was a main effect of grade level, significant also at $p < .001$, which is described in Figure 2. Quite obviously, it is a curvilinear function, with the most prejudice in the ninth grade and the least in the 12th.

There was no interaction of grade level with sex but there was with race, significant at $p < .005$, and this is shown in figure 3. We see that the distributions for blacks and whites are similar with the marked exception of the 9th grade. Here the black students are at their peak of negative racial feelings while the whites are at about their most tolerant.

The curve is also notably flatter for the white sample, suggesting that there were more extreme differences between grade levels in the attitudes of the blacks.

These distributions are consistent in one aspect with some data reported by Lombardi (1962) regarding attitudes of whites toward blacks in newly integrated Maryland high schools. He found also that 12th graders were more positive than children in grades nine through 11. The question for both sets of findings, however, is whether they reflect actual attitudinal differences or, perhaps, a more sophisticated sense of socially desirable responding on the part of the older students.

In regard to the temporal analyses, the mean for the March sample was 11.45 and for the May sample, 11.08.³ The confidence level for this difference was .07, which did suggest strongly that racial attitudes became more positive in general during the first semester of integration.

Surprisingly, to us at least, there were no interactions approaching significance of time with sex, race or grade level. We feel, however, that the trends of these relationships are worth reporting.

Decreases in prejudice were more than two and a half times greater for females than males and more than three times greater for blacks than whites. Within these groups, black females changed more than twice as much as white females; and all of the change for males was attributable to blacks. The function of these effects was that blacks were somewhat more prejudiced than whites at the beginning of the semester and somewhat less at the end.

In the absence of statistical support we must assume that these differences may well have been due to random fluctuation. Nevertheless they are congruent to data from the only other longitudinal study of newly integrated high schools we have found, in which attitude changes on the part of blacks and whites were assessed separately. This was by McWhirt (1967), in a southern community, and his finding was that blacks showed significantly greater change in the direction of tolerance than whites.

The trend of the interaction between time and grade is shown in figure 4. Though the confidence level for this interaction falls between .20 and .25, it is apparent that virtually all of the decrease in prejudice that did occur was in grades seven through nine.

Considering all the data of this study, there are several aspects

that seem particularly relevant to school mergers and their potential effects on racial attitudes.

The findings, or non-findings, that give us most pause are the strikingly low frequencies of interracial interactions in all schools, and the very meager suggestion that interracial contacts increased at all during the first four months of the merger. These conclusions are, naturally, subject to the limitations of our measure. We feel, however, that the extent to which blacks and whites mingle on their way from classes is probably a valid index of the extent to which they are enjoined socially throughout the day. For the most part, then, this merger resulted in mutual exposure of the races but not in integration in any real sense.

Nonetheless, racial attitudes did not worsen, as might have been expected, and there was a strong suggestion that they improved. As we described previously, dissonance reduction may account for some of this change. Related also is Zajonc's (1968) work on the enhancing attitudinal effects of mere exposure. Further, Williams (1968) found that blacks in a segregated southern high school who were to be integrated the following year were philosophically committed to the action but personally very apprehensive. The gradual relief of these anxieties may have contributed, in our sample, to the improvement of attitudes.

Finally, we are compelled to note that tolerance did increase for the most part in grades seven through nine, where there was the greatest amount of interracial interaction. These effects did not approach significance and the absolute percentages of interracial contacts were quite low; however, the suggestion of this relationship seems worth pursuing. It would appear that the

most salient task for school systems engaged in racial mergers are to plan programs that result in integration in more than an administrative sense.

Cottle (1967) made this observation in general about school integration programs:

"The sadness of the drama is that it takes place with almost no psychological preparation and with no time devoted to the resolution of human and institutional complications. Yet as though by some magic, students are supposed to live together peaceably and to learn something. The drama's irony is that where schools in the past have exulted in their socializing function, when integration becomes a reality they hurriedly retreat to their fundamental didactic activities. School boards try to combine the races in varying ratios--advantageous to the whites but justified by national or regional proportions--with the hope that somehow the kids will work it out." (p. 22)

To pose the problem, however, is far simpler than to pose a solution.

Gaughran (1965) wrote about the efficacy of bi-racial discussion groups in a recently integrated northern high school. These were conducted also in the Gainesville high school and reports have it that they were quite successful in facilitating communication and understanding among group members. This vehicle, however, reaches a small and select sample of volunteers who are obviously among the most receptive to bi-racial friendships. The premise that the inclinations fostered in these groups become disseminated among the school population at large seems, at least from our data, to be unduly optimistic. It would appear that more massive efforts are required.

When I showed the data of our first observation period to the high school principal, which was at about the time racial matters in that school were heating up, he asked if I had any ideas for increasing interaction.

My suggestion was quasi-humorous; that he plant a few smudge pots to simulate a fire and put everyone to work in an old fashioned fire line, passing books and supplies out of the building. There is no better way than a crisis to start people talking to each other and then, I thought, they might continue. He naturally rejected the suggestion and I admit that I have not come up with a better idea, but it would seem that there is no more compelling question for our community psychologists and educators.

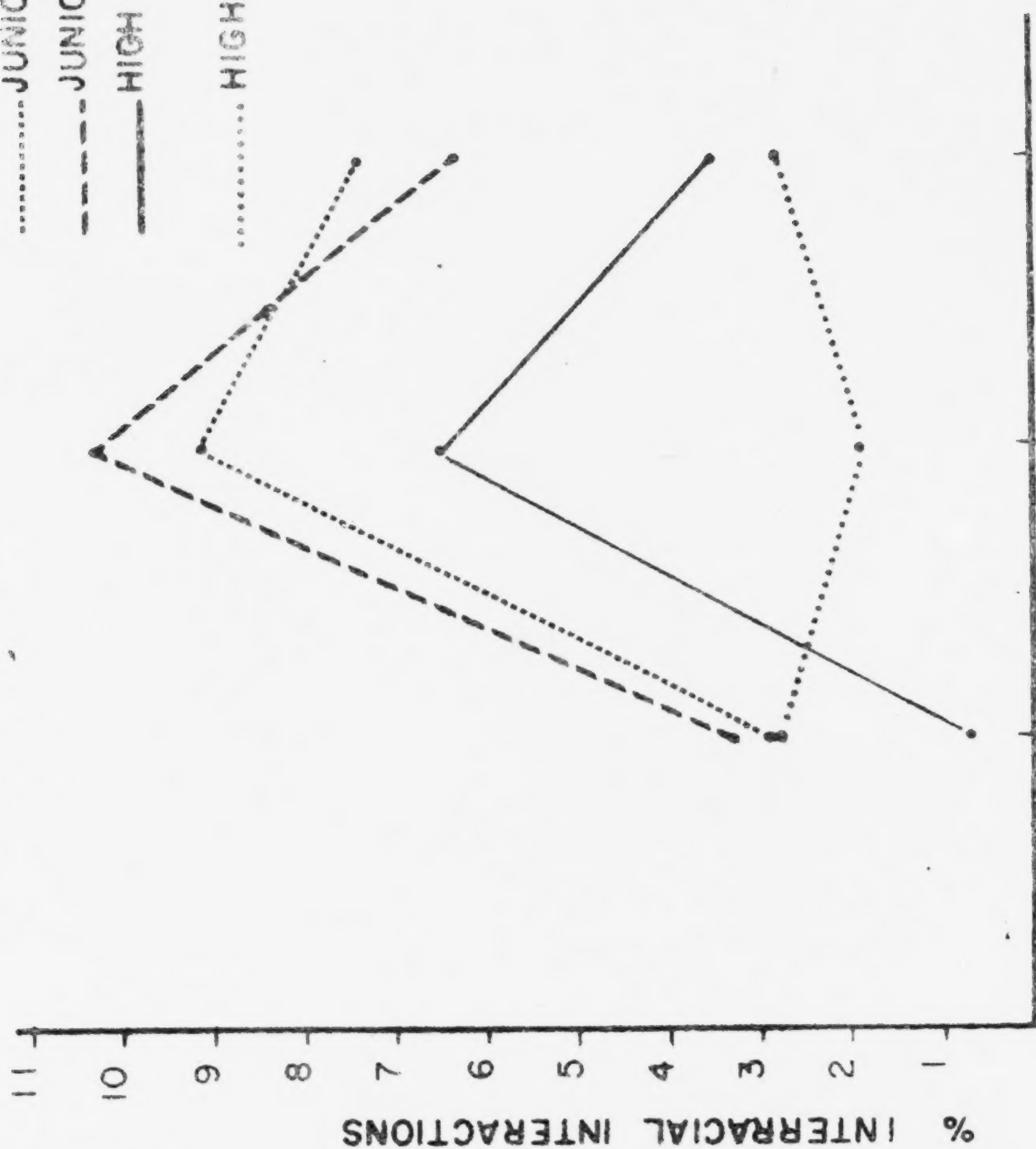
Footnotes

1. The authors express their gratitude to the Alachua County Board of Education and to the Principals and other administrators of the various schools for their assistance and cooperation throughout the project. Martha Kemp, Bobbie Irving and Edward Leach were the observers for this study and also provided many helpful suggestions.
2. This report was presented in the symposium titled, The Revolutions in Our School Systems at the meetings of the Eastern Psychological Association, April, 1971, in New York City.
3. Incomplete questionnaires; i.e. those with one or more of the three race items unanswered or without designation of sex or name (without which we could not determine race), were excluded. There were 282 exclusions for the March group and 52 for May, and the resultant sample Ns were 1424 and 1201, respectively. The greater number of incomplete questionnaires in the first testing may have reflected more adverse attitudes during this period; hence differences between time samples, to some extent, may have underestimated actual attitude change.

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..... JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL I
 ---- JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL II
 ——— HIGH SCHOOL - 10th GRADE
 SESSION
 HIGH SCHOOL - 11th & 12th
 GRADE SESSION



WEEK OF: MARCH 11 APRIL 17 MAY 26

OBSERVATION PERIODS

FIG. 1 PERCENTAGES OF INTERRACIAL INTERACTIONS
 BETWEEN SCHOOLS, ACROSS TIME

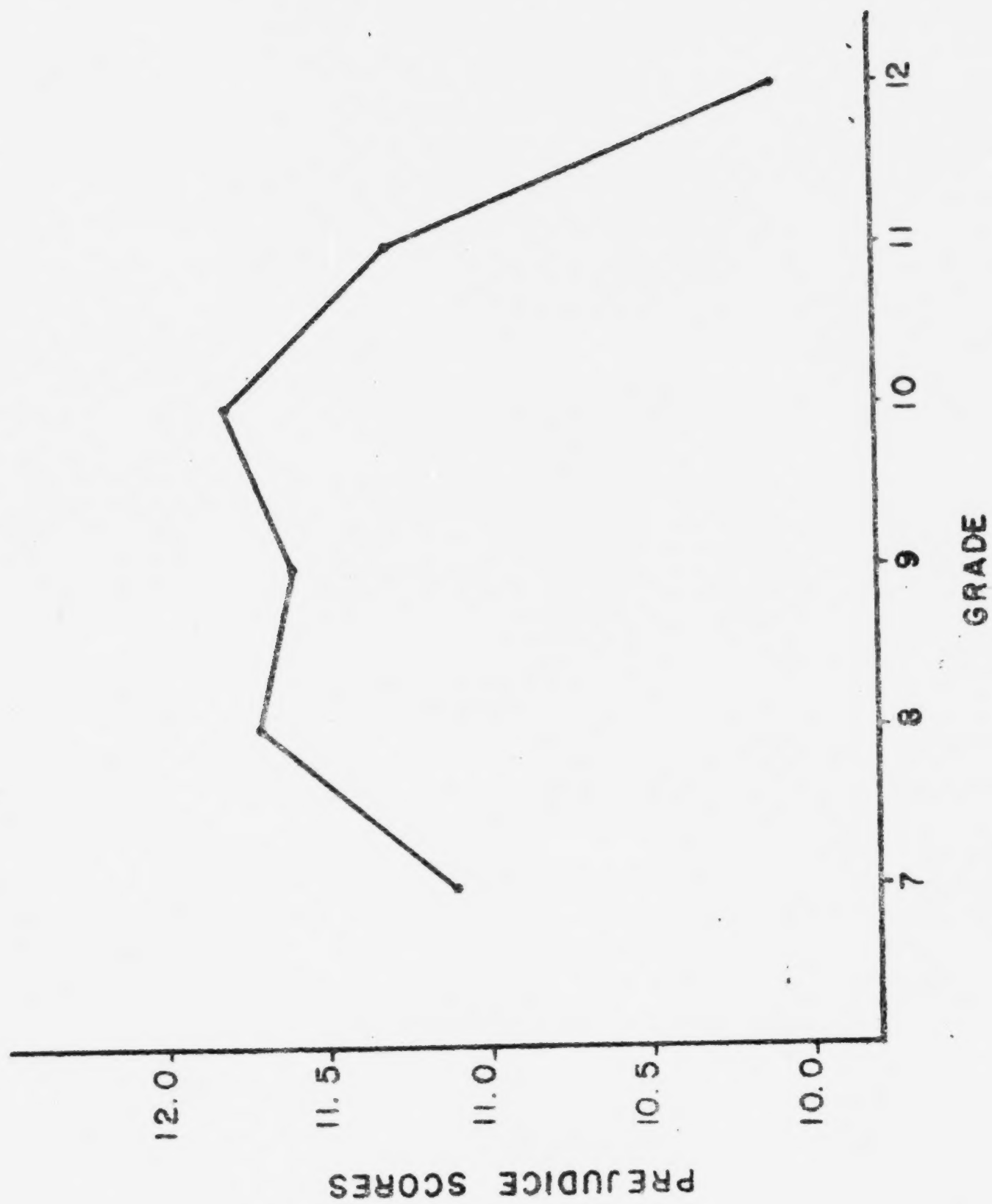


FIG. 2 MEAN PREJUDICE SCORES BY GRADE LEVEL

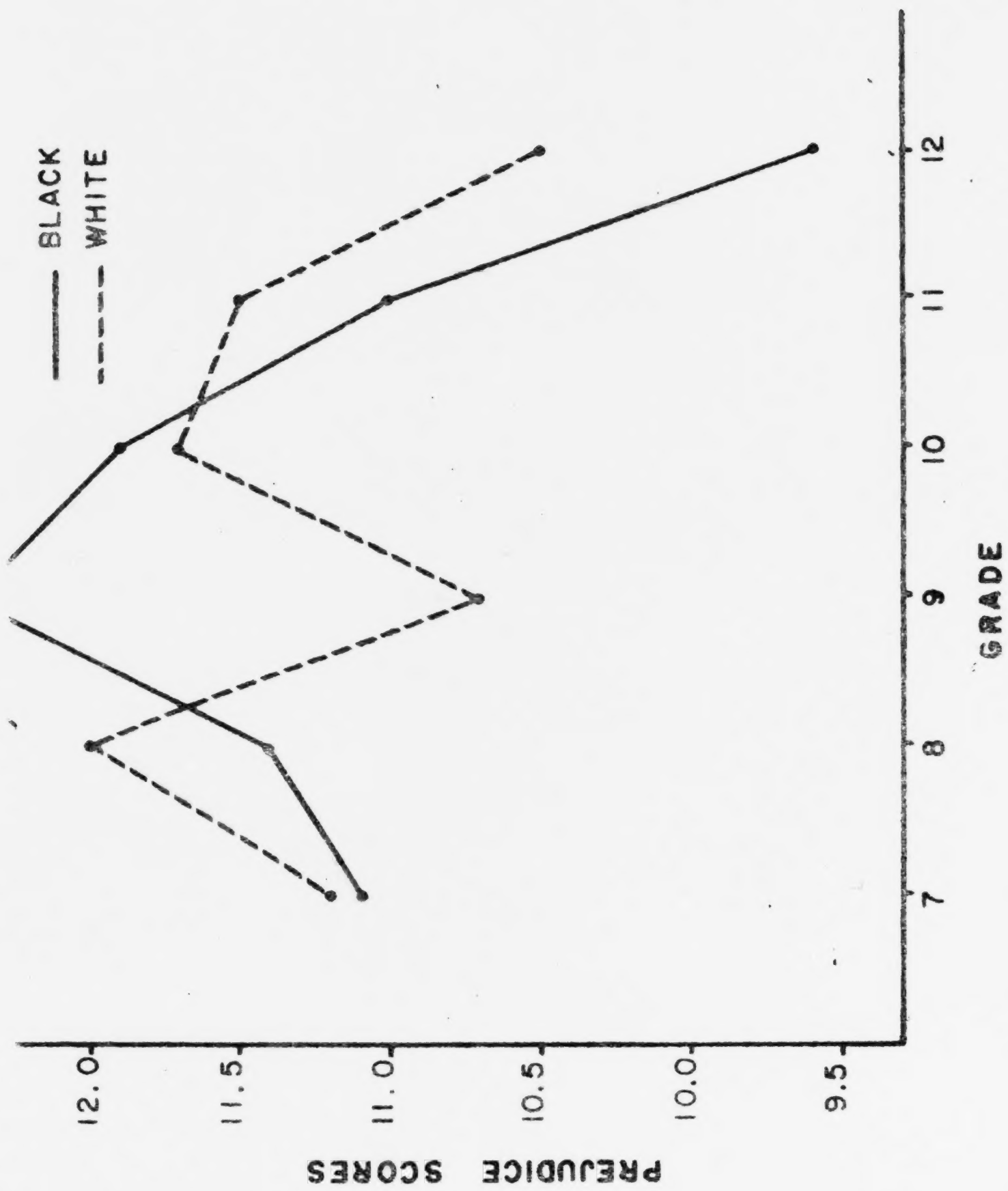


FIG. 3 MEAN PREJUDICE SCORES BY RACE AND GRADE LEVEL

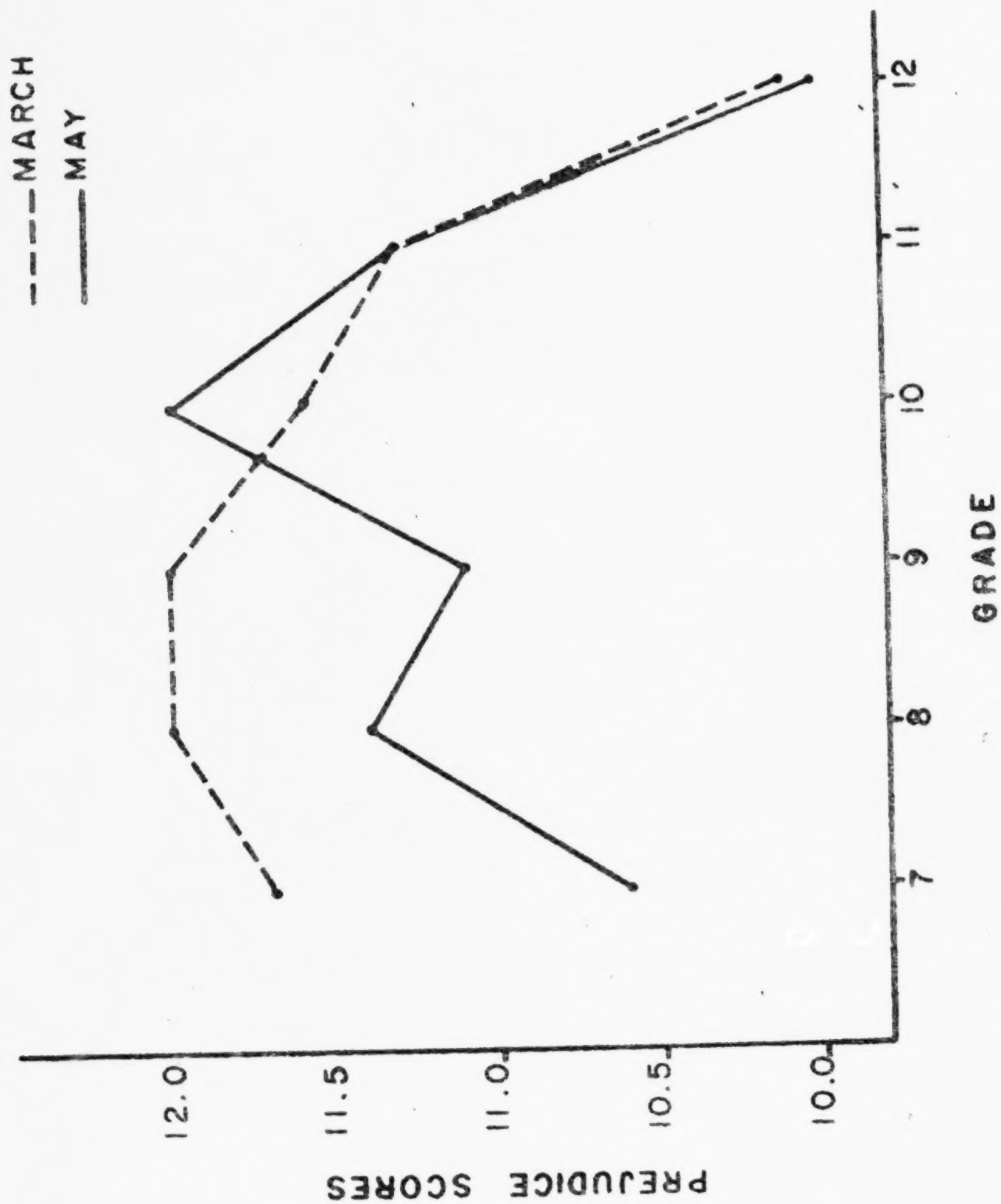


FIG. 4 MEAN PREJUDICE SCORES BY TIME AND GRADE LEVEL